

A LIFE-LONG MODERATE

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ROBERT PALMER, L.
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A LIFE-LONG MODERATE DRINKER ON TEETOTALISM.

By J. FOSTER PALMER, L.R.C.P., etc., President of the Chelsea
Clinical Society.

I HAVE listened long to hear a sound argument in favour of teetotalism, and hoped to see it in Dr. Crespi's article. Whether I found it or not this deponent sayeth not, but I found an explanation of my previous failure. The opposition to teetotalism, it seems (when not captious or ungenerous), is the outcome of ignorance. There is nothing like a good sweeping assertion, especially when, like the present one, it takes in the greater part of the civilised world. There is, perhaps, a suspicion of the "no case: abuse plaintiff's attorney" argument about it, but its boldness and comprehensiveness will cover a multitude of sins. Carlyle's well-known dictum is hardly "in it" by comparison. Accepting, therefore, the soft impeachment, I would venture, under cover of this ignorance, to ask for information on certain points which are usually taken for granted, but which seem, to those without the pale, to require a little further demonstration.

In the first place, there is the complaint of criticism. Why, it may be asked, should the observations of teetotalers be specially exempted from what all the rest of the world is subject to? Public utterances which cannot stand the test of criticism have surely a flimsy foundation. If they are of any value, criticism is the best means of bringing them into notice.

Nor am I yet convinced that the appearance of a medical advocate of temperance on the platform does not afford him a very excellent advertisement.

I cannot claim to have attended hundreds of meetings on the subject, but I have heard much more than I have spoken, and thought much more than I have written upon it. I must further confess myself to be that *bête noir* of the teetotaler, a moderate drinker. I am not in the least surprised at the irritation produced in the mind of the teetotaler by the existence of so great an anomaly. It is a standing menace to him and his cause. He cannot away with it. Why should a man be able to go through life drinking every day and never exceeding, and keeping a steady hand and a cool head with which to answer all opponents? It is uncanny. It is a reproach to the cause. On the other hand, the drunkard advertises it. He supplies the *raison d'être* for its existence. He is a living example, known and read of all men.

I well know that in the present day it is rank heresy to proclaim a moderate opinion. Extreme views on all subjects alone are listened to. But may I not say with Shylock: "Hath not a moderate drinker eyes? If you prick us, do we not bleed?" This being so, I venture to take exception to certain teetotal statistics. Moderate drinkers are classed with drunkards, and the net result credited (or otherwise) to the former. Moderate drinkers should be placed in one class, and the drunkards and teetotalers in the other. The extremes against the mean. The temperate against the intemperate. The results would be somewhat modified.

This would coincide, too, with the Aristotelian code of ethics. Virtue is defined as a mean between two extremes. The mean is the virtue, the extremes are vices. Temperance is the virtue, drunkenness and teetotalism the vices.

In the present day, however, Christian ethics are more prevalent. "Let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of the evil one."* If a teetotal pledge is not something more than nay, nay, in

* τοῦ πονηροῦ.

this sense, words have no meaning. The evil is shown in the facility with which such pledges are broken. I have heard of teetotalers breaking the pledge with a light heart and actually taking it *again*, as if the first did not remain equally binding. To a conscientious moderate drinker the breaking of such a vow would be a far more serious matter than it seems to be to teetotalers, to judge by the way they speak of it. To drink to excess may or may not be a crime. To drink at all after vowing to abstain is undoubtedly one, and a very heinous one. The great Lord Shaftesbury was more than once asked to sign the pledge. He replied: "God has given me ten commandments to keep, and it is all I can do to keep those. Shall I give myself more?" Who that has conscientiously tried to keep the ten commandments, in the spirit as well as in the letter, would dare to lay this extra burden on his soul? I can hardly believe in the sincerity, certainly not in the modesty, of those who think their way so perfect that they can afford to add to their obligations; who say, in effect, "What! only ten commandments! I can keep that little lot on my head. Give me another."

We are told that preaching moderation is futile, and that he who preaches abstinence must practise it. The mention of Mr. Weyland, one of the most successful of city missionaries, and whom I knew well, reminds me that he was not an abstainer. But why fall back on minor instances? One who spake as never man spake, and taught as never man taught, who preached, not temperance alone, but all other virtues, did not find it necessary to be a total abstainer. The teetotalers of the day, indeed, called Him a wine-bibber. What was good enough for the Great Teacher and Exemplar should be good enough for His disciples. When we have learned His lessons it will be soon enough to improve upon them. When Dr. Crespi can point to us a nobler example it will be time to follow it. Two thousand years' teaching of Christianity has not, it is true, abolished intemperance, but it has done better things than this. Are we such perfect Christians that we can presume to condemn the methods of its Founder as imperfect?

There is another question on which my ignorance longs to

be enlightened, and that is the objection teetotalers raise to a glass, say, of ale, while a cup of tea, which is a far more powerful stimulant, is indulged in by them with impunity. The only answer I could ever get to this question was: "You *might* take two or more". This I absolutely deny. I may safely say I have never taken two consecutive glasses of malt liquor in my life. I don't think I could. Tea would be a far greater temptation. I can never look upon a teetotaler as consistent who does not also give up tea, coffee and cocoa as well. I *think* I ought to say tobacco also. Any general principle that includes one must include all.

One of the pitfalls I have seen open to pledge-takers among my patients and others is this (I am unwilling to denounce it as hypocrisy, for I believe many of them to be sincere, and to do it in ignorance). Feeling "below par," they fly to tincture of quinine or sal volatile, without any reference to medical orders. When I find this out I address them to this effect: "Tincture of quinine is at least twice as strong as the strongest brandy, and spirit of ammonia is stronger still. If you are determined to drink, drink brandy like an honest man, or woman, and 'lay not that flattering unction to your soul' that you can escape your obligation to abstain by calling your stimulants by another name." Others have told me they "didn't suppose a little claret mattered at all," they had not "touched a drop of beer". These, I suppose, were not fair specimens. Again I ask for information.

Pitfalls are not confined to the total abstinence pledge. There is a pledge to drink nothing except at meals. I have known young men at Cambridge, after dining together in hall, adjourn to one another's rooms to drink whisky. "What! eat between meals? No, eat a piece of cake and call it supper." I doubt if the Pharisees were ever guilty of a greater piece of hypocrisy. Is not this observing the letter and ignoring the spirit of the pledge?

Yet another question I must ask, for my experience of temperance meetings is not extensive enough to answer it. Do *all* the intolerant and illogical speeches referred to come from good but ignorant men, or are some of them simply paid

for? In *one* case which I know of the speaker had primed himself for it by three large "goes" of whisky at King's Cross Station. My information comes from the best possible source, the chairman of the meeting, a highly esteemed clergyman, who had seen it. To avoid a scandal and injury to the cause, he did not denounce him, but he spoke to him afterwards. The effect was striking.

It has appeared to me (rightly or wrongly) to be assumed that intemperance is the greatest cause of mental, moral and physical evil. That it is so, I deny. What fills the outpatient department of our hospitals, and what saps the lives of multitudes before they begin to drink, and of others who never drink at all? If drink has slain its thousands, licentiousness has slain its tens of thousands, and the greed of gold has wrought more mental and moral deterioration than the two together.

Total abstinence is upheld on account of its "absolute safety". There are many things of which this can be said. We are absolutely safe not to be drowned at sea if we always remain on land. One and a half per cent. is usually very safe, but it is not filling at the price.

After all it is very difficult to define how far children care for stimulants, and if they do, why. They vary greatly even in one family. It partly depends on heredity, partly on other influences. I know what has happened, and will happen again. Six children, one of whom is a teetotaler, are left alone in a room with a decanter of wine. The only one who evinces a desire to taste it is the teetotal child. Stolen waters are sweet.

But "the crowning argument in support of total abstinence is the misery, extravagance and disease due to intemperance". Yes: and the crowning argument against the procreation of the species is the misery, extravagance and disease caused by licentiousness; and the crowning argument against employing horses is the misery, extravagance and distress caused by horse-racing.

It is always assumed that the total abstainer has a greater influence than the moderate drinker. This, from one point of view, I venture to dispute. In all other matters reasonable

people are apt to discount the advice and opinion of the faddist, and I venture to think they are in this matter also. A patient, we will say, is ruining his health by excessive indulgence in stimulants. I recommend total abstinence. His first question perhaps would be, "Are you a total abstainer yourself?" If I replied in the affirmative he would say to himself, "This man is a fanatic, a faddist. He has only one idea. He gives the same advice to all indiscriminately. I shall not follow it." If, on the other hand, I said I was not, he would say, "This man is not prejudiced in favour of total abstinence. He must have good grounds for giving this advice. I will follow it." This would be the reasoning of a potentially healthy mind. There would be others, I admit, who would take the opposite view, who would say, in effect, "I will abstain if you do: I will get drunk or do any other foolish thing you like to name, if you will do the same." Such weak-minded people are hardly worth the trouble of advising. The next person they met would inevitably nullify whatever advice had been given them.

There are sometimes worse occupations than drinking. The most atrocious crimes, including the great crime of the first century, have been carefully planned by sober, thoughtful, unclouded minds. The teetotal President of the Transvaal Republic would have been better employed over the bottle than in hatching his diabolical plot to abolish English influence in South Africa and inaugurate an era of slavery, cruelty and corruption. We hear much of minds and bodies sacrificed to drink. Have they never been saved by it? What would some not give for even a temporary cessation of "the wheels of thought?" "If anybody," says Oliver Wendell Holmes, "would only contrive some kind of a lever that one could thrust in among the works of this horrid automaton and check them, or alter their rate of going, what would the world give for the discovery?" "'From half a dime to a dime, according to the style of the place and the quality of the liquor,' said the young fellow whom they called John." Temporary cessation of thought is of possible value.

I am told by a well-known specialist on diseases of the chest, as the result of life-long experience, that teetotalers

succumb more readily to bronchitis than moderate drinkers. I mention this because, as a rule, it is only the experience that tells the other way that we hear about. Observers appear to me to be unwilling to make public anything that tends in the opposite direction. Curiously, it coincides, though I should not like to give it as evidence, with the reply made to me by a cabman when I inquired if they did not feel the great exposure to cold. "Not if we are well lined within," he said; "it is this teetotalism that kills our men. They get bronchitis and die."

"I know this is unpopular, I know 'tis blasphemous," as Byron would say, yet I think that no one who is not "bound down" by prejudice would deny that alcohol is a powerful bactericide, and that that degree of physical depression which favours infection may, by stimulants, be sometimes averted until the danger of infection is over. It is easy, too, to call the medical the "drunken profession," and there are, no doubt, many instances; but I believe it is the experience of many caterers that less wine is needed for medical dinners than for most others. The cases that do occur, I believe, are due to the exceptionally trying character of the work. No one who has not had experience of country practice has any idea what it is. I doubt if there are many men sufficiently robust to stand the strain without recourse to stimulants. In fact, many who do not resort to them break down mentally or physically.

I cannot quite agree with Dr. Crespi's estimate of Cardinal Manning. I have not heard him speak on the temperance question, but I have heard him preach twice. The first time the sermon was an appeal for hospitals, and left nothing to be desired. It was one of those "temperate utterances" referred to. On the second occasion it included, among other subjects, prayer, theatres and dancing, and if it did not embody a combination of fanaticism, intolerance and exaggeration, words, to me, have no meaning. But this, again, is my ignorance.

The question of the non-transmission of acquired characteristics has been so fully discussed by Dr. Archdall Reid that I need not dwell upon it. I need only say that although this law is no doubt very general, I cannot believe it to be

absolutely universal. The undoubted fact, however, remains stamped on the history of the world, that the longer a race has been familiar with the use of alcohol, the less is the tendency to use it to excess. So, too, does the fact I have often pointed out, that, speaking generally, the nations where there is most drunkenness are those which show the greatest mental activity and progress, and that, conversely, the cessation of drunkenness in a nation has always been synchronous with its mental deterioration. I do not seek to explain the fact, except to suggest that possibly the constant struggle against the temptation to intemperance, and the consequent education of the powers of self-control, may be one of the means by which the human mind is disciplined and strengthened. Such discipline, for the total abstainer, does not exist. A drunkard who becomes a total abstainer is not a much better man than he was before. He has lost the opportunity of that daily cultivation of self-control which alone can make *men* of himself and his children. (This form of heredity, I believe, does not come under the above law, as the quality presumably exists, though in an undeveloped state.) Although I cannot endorse the means suggested by Dr. Archdall Reid, there is no doubt that the only way to abolish drunkenness is to diminish procreation by drunkards.

The *raison d'être* of a social dinner is the "feast of reason and the flow of soul". We do not go out to dinner for what we can get to eat and drink; we go for the conversation and interchange of thought, which is then at its best. At a dinner of intelligent men we receive and impart more mental food than we should in a far longer time in any other circumstances whatever. This concentration of ideas, rapidity of thought and readiness of speech, I am willing to admit, are accentuated, if not actually brought about, in some degree, by the wine we drink. Yet, though the abstainers may hold up their hands in horror, I venture to maintain that the loss would be a regrettable one. I know that the same results do not take place to the same extent where nearly all the guests are teetotalers.

Teetotalers always appear to argue from the particular to the general. Because total abstinence agrees with one, it is

recommended to all. This appears to us ignorant ones to be about as logical and scientific as to recommend calomel or quinine to every one because some one had derived benefit from them. Such wholesale prescribing is unworthy of our profession, and those who practise it reduce themselves to the level of quacks.

Our ignorance, I presume, results from want of experience. We have not tried total abstinence, and therefore must not speak of it. But this argument cuts both ways. Might I not say to the life-long abstainer, you are ignorant of moderate drinking, and therefore must not speak of it? Try it (unless, indeed, you have taken the pledge; in which case, although you may have done a foolish thing, you are bound by it).

Utilitarianism and beauty are both *caviare* to the teetotaler, otherwise we might say, What is to become of our beautiful vineyards? even as we might say to the vegetarian, What is to become of our flocks and herds? They would have to provide for themselves, while we devour their sustenance.

And, lastly, to what dull monotony should we be reduced if universal abstinence were to deprive us of the entertainment, the mental stimulus now afforded us by the denunciations, the exaggerated views and occasional sophistries, of the teetotaler!

ASEPTIC SURGERY.

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(Concluded from page 104.)

THE hands and forearms of the operator and his assistant are prepared in a similar manner, omitting the shaving. The nails should be short, and every visible particle of dirt removed; and here a stiff nail-brush is indispensable. The hands are disinfected while the patient is going under the anæsthetic, and it is an additional safeguard to redisinfect the patient's skin at the same time.

Recently some writers have strongly advocated the wearing of sterilised cotton or silk gloves during the performance of operations. Worn over septic hands they would almost necessarily become septic during an operation, and if the hands are sterile they are useless, and cannot fail to interfere with the free movements and tactile sense of the fingers. For these reasons I do not think their general use desirable. Thin indiarubber gloves, although they are even more embarrassing to the wearer than cotton ones, should be worn as a precaution against infection in cases where the operator has an open wound on his hand and is operating through septic tissues.

Instruments should be made of solid steel, nickel-plated to prevent rusting. They are first thoroughly scrubbed in hot

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